

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

July 24, 2006

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Pelosi:

On behalf of the 2.4 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and our Auxiliaries, I am writing to express our serious concern with several bills recently introduced that could result in harm to veteran's benefits and health care. These bills, all of which would create "Sunset Commissions" on federal agencies and programs include H.R. 3282 and H.R. 5766, both of which are scheduled for a floor vote this week.

While these bills do not single out veterans programs, they do have the potential to dramatically alter the health care and benefits provided to this nation's former defenders. We certainly do not believe that this is an attempt to undermine or do away with VA. We continue to believe that this nation understands and supports its obligations to its defenders as part of the ongoing costs of war. But, we are concerned that compelling the congress to vote up or down on legislative proposals to terminate or modify existing federal programs, including VA, made by unelected commissions, could undermine VA's mission. That is unacceptable.

For one these unelected commissions would have no direct accountability either to the voting public or those who would be affected by their legislative proposals. These commissions most likely would not have the direct knowledge and appreciation of the needs of the veteran's community. Together, these two facts make it entirely possible that the commission's recommendations would be at odds with what veterans need and what this nation expects. This, too, is unacceptable. The existing congressional committee system works well, allowing veterans to have input through hearings, and careful consideration by committee members and staff who are subject matter experts. While not always agreeing with their views, their years of work and involvement mean they far better understand the Department's incredibly complex workings and exigencies than members of an appointed Commission. If major changes are needed, the current democratic process is more than sufficient.

★ WASHINGTON OFFICE ★

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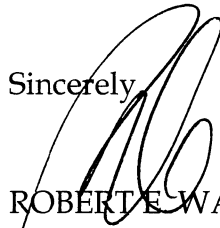
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Another concern with sunset provisions is the fact that the majority of veterans' programs are aimed at solving long-term problems--whether that's health care for wounded veterans or disability benefits to make veterans whole. These programs are life-long programs that should not and cannot be threatened with elimination. They require long-term solutions and, by definition, a sunset provision is not a long-term answer.

This is an issue that we will be monitoring very closely. While we can understand and support the desire to improve government efficiency and maintain fiscal discipline, those are things that must be done with the best interest of veterans in mind. That is something that these bills fail to do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Wallace', with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

ROBERT E. WALLACE
Executive Director
VFW Washington Office